1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

the Lepchas' ethics and attitudes which go to make a culture are founded on a community of equal citizens; divorced from such a community the Lepcha culture is meaningless. To some extent the Lepchas have adapted themselves to the changed conditions, accepting the way of life and language of their neighbours. But compared with the Nepali and Plains Indians they are wasteful agriculturists and they have a relatively high standard of living; despite some legal protection—the Lepcha cannot be dispossessed of his last five acres of land—it seems as though they must disappear fairly rapidly, either through want or through absorption. In India a certain amount of intermarriage goes on between Lepchas and Nepali; the Lepcha woman is esteemed for her physical appearance and her mild and yielding character.

In the last census nearly all Lepchas are entered as Buddhists; a little over a thousand had been converted to Christianity. Despite the small numbers the Lepchas represent one of the most fruitful fields of missionary endeavour in Northern India; and the conversion of individuals to Christianity seems to have modified the converts' character far more profoundly than the earlier group conversion to Buddhism. The Christians with whom I came in contact exhibited a strong sense of individual sin (an attitude lamaism has been unable to implant) and excessive prudery, with which was coupled a tendency to snigger at excretory functions.

ii

In an endeavour to gain converts the Baptist mission went to the length of translating and printing in the artificial Lepcha script three books of the New Testament. This seems to have been a work of almost complete supererogation, for the Lepcha script, never widely known, has now completely fallen into disuse; in order to read the scriptures Lepchas have to learn a new, and otherwise completely useless, alphabet; most of them are far more familiar with Nepali.

The Lepcha alphabet was invented at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century by King Cha-dor of Sikkim. According to Albert Grünwedel the Lepcha alphabet is derived from a form of the Tibetan U-med alphabet.[3] Some sort

[3] This resemblance is not very obvious to the lay eye; out of the 56 Lepcha characters 18 have no parallel in the U-med alphabet, and, of the 38 signs common to both, over half have very different forms.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

289 of two species of daphne (*ri-kan-too* and *dé-nok*) cooked to a pulp and then spread over coarse canvas on stretchers under flowing water. Paper can be made by anyone, either for monastery use or for sale; but since there are no printing blocks in Zongu books have [242] to be sent away to be stamped. For ordinary writing an ink is made out of black earth.

346 To the front of the monastery is a piece of artificially raised 351 level ground of perhaps fifteen yards depth. It is covered with fairly rough short grass; and at the far edge against the low stone wall are set up a number of prayer flags in memory of the dead, and a few for the benefit of the living. There are one or two small outcrops of rock. All round the building, except in front of the porch, is a narrow flower border in which are grown European flowers, of which seeds or cuttings have been brought from Gangtok—hollyhocks, petunias, sweet william, geraniums, dahlias, and flowering cactuses. In the grass near the wall are several large bushes of small-flowered pink and red roses and some large clumps of hydrangeas. The flowers from these plants are used to decorate the lamaist altar, in preference to the numerous orchids which can be found in the neighbourhood.

Below the monastery wall is a small wood chiefly composed of juniper and *ficus*; about fifty yards from the monastery inside the wood are four *choten* walls—long rectangular stone barrows with stones inscribed with prayers let into the side. The most considerable of these is surmounted by a terra-cotta decoration of a half-moon and three diminishing circles. These *choten* are not funeral 796 piles, nor even cenotaphs; their intention is apotropaic.[6] Some religious ceremonies are performed by the *choten*, particularly those in which both lamas and Mun (the priests of the old Lepcha religion) take part, for the latter are not allowed to officiate within the monastery precincts. The wood is also used as a public latrine [514] during festivals, and animals, particularly pigs and cows, come to pasture there.

351 To the right of the monastery is an ordinary Lepcha house (except that the entrance is on the west instead of the east side) ● 794 which is normally the home of the monastery custodian who looks after the garden and ground. He has a small garden (*sing*) in front of the house and also one or two little enclosures with

[6] I am employing the term *apotropaic* for all religious actions whose aim is preventative rather than curative. The *choten* are to keep devils away, not to expel those already present.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

tree tomato bushes, chilli bushes, onions, etc. inside the monastery precincts; but for the greater part of his food he is dependent on gifts from the villagers. The holder of this office was a very old man called Pong-ring, born in 1852; he was very feeble, half blind, suffered from polyps which made him almost incomprehensible even to the Lepchas, and his body was covered with the most revolting open sores. To accommodate our staff he had been turned out of his house and was taken as a boarder by the next nearest house, the owner of which, Jiroong, could trace a very distant relationship with him. In his very old age he was abnormally pious, hardly moving without his personal prayer wheel. He had never received proper religious instruction and could not read (or go through the motions of reading); his devotions were limited to those of the uninstructed and usually illiterate nuns and a number of rather unkind jokes, considering his age and feebleness, were made about his position as head of the female congregation. As an old man past his work, unable to support himself and without children, he was not respected by the other Lepchas, most of whom felt, as I did, that he would be better dead; and some of the rather heartless children used to call out to him 'Why don't you die now while the Europeans are here, so that they can see your funeral?'. He was constantly having attacks of illness, but always recovered, to my, I hope, disguised distress; he was a very unpleasant spectacle and neighbour, and I should have liked to have seen the funeral of a lama, which I was not able to do.

At the back of the monastery the wooded hill goes up steeply to some cultivated land and a small group of houses. To the west is a small open alp with a few fruit trees in it, and beyond that slightly rising ground, this year not cultivated, and then about half a mile or more away another group of four houses.

iii

The monastery is almost exactly in the middle of Lingthem. Of the 33 houses 14 are above the monastery and the rest below, 14 to the east and the rest to the west. There are five groups of four houses each, one of three, and the rest either isolated or in pairs.

Lepcha houses are rectangular buildings raised about four feet off the ground on stone piles which go round three sides of the building; the east side is left open, and the space underneath serves as a shelter at night for domestic animals. The building

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

778 the necessary expense, have a preliminary service carried
842 out in the chapel, lasting for one or two days, after which the box containing the holy relics is brought forth and ceremoniously opened. Each article is placed on the heads of the suppliants, the officiating Lama meanwhile repeating various charms and spells. Of the marvellous efficacy of this procedure many stories are told: and should two sons result, one of them is invariably dedicated to the Church.

175 Subsequent to Lha-tsun's death in the latter end of the
794 seventeenth century, Lamaism has steadily progressed in Sikkim till latterly monks and monasteries filled the country.
[212] What civilisation and literature the Sikkimese now possess they owe entirely to Lamaism, and the Lepcha alphabet too was derived from the Tibetan.

175 The official version of the story, as given in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, is somewhat different, and brings the history up to date. It runs as follows:

"Local tradition asserts that the ancestors of the Rajas of Sikkim originally came from the neighbourhood of Lhasa in Tibet. About the middle of the seventeenth century, the head of the family was named Puntsok Numgye; and to him repaired three Tibetan monks, professors of Nyingmapa (or 'red-cap' sect of Buddhism), who were disgusted at the predominance of the Gelukpa sect in Tibet. These Lamas succeeded in converting the Lepchas of Sikkim to their own faith, and in making Pun-tsok Raja of the country. The *avatars* of two of these Lamas are now the heads, respectively, of the great monasteries of Pemiongchi and Tashiding. In 1788 the Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in the governorship of the Morang or *tarai*, and only retired in 1789 on the Tibetan government ceding to them a piece of territory at the head of the Koti Pass. But in 1792, on a second invasion of Tibetan territory by the Gurkhas, an immense Chinese army advanced to the support of the Tibetans, defeated the Gurkhas, and dictated terms to them almost at the gates of Kathmandu."

It may be noted in passing that this account was probably

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

Bhotanese, and others. Rheumatism is frequent, and intermittent fevers, with ague; also violent and often fatal remittents, almost invariably induced by sleeping in the hot valleys, especially at the beginning and end of the rains. The European complaints of liver and bowel disease are all but unknown. Death is regarded with horror. The dead are burnt or buried, sometimes both; much depending on custom and position. Omens are sought in the entrails of fowls, &c., and other vestiges of their savage origin are still preserved, though now gradually disappearing.

The Lepchas profess no religion, though acknowledging the existence of good and bad spirits. To the good they pay no heed; "Why should we?" they say, "the good spirits do us no harm; the evil spirits, who dwell in every rock, grove, and mountain, are constantly at mischief, and to them we must pray, for they hurt us." Every tribe has a priest-doctor; he neither knows nor attempts to practise the healing art, but is a pure exorcist; all bodily ailments being deemed the operations of devils, who are cast out by prayers and invocations. Still they acknowledge the Lamas to be very holy men, and were the latter only moderately active, they would soon convert all the Lepchas. Their priests are called "Bijooas:" they profess mendicancy, and seem intermediate between the begging friars of Tibet, whose dress and attributes they assume, and the exorcists of the aboriginal Lepchas: they sing, dance (masked and draped like harlequins), beg, bless, curse, and are merry mountebanks; those that affect more of the Lama Boodhist carry the "Mani," or revolving praying machine, and wear rosaries and amulets; others again are all tatters and rags. They are often employed to carry messages, and to transact little knaveries. The natives stand in some awe of them, and being besides of a